

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on International Relations  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International  
Operations**

**The Department of State's Border Security Program**

**Testimony of Daniel B. Smith  
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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Payne, Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to describe to you the activities of the Border Security Program, how we identify the Program's priorities, and how our strategy for implementation supports the border security objectives of our nation.

The Department of State has no higher responsibility than safeguarding our nation's citizens, both abroad and at home, and the Border Security Program is designed with these objectives in mind. The Department protects the lives and interests of American citizens abroad by ensuring that they have the consular information, services and assistance they need to reside, conduct business, study and travel abroad. We enhance homeland security through vigilance in U.S. passport and visa processes. We also enhance U.S. national security by facilitating legitimate travel to the United States for tourism, business, education and exchange.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) is responsible for implementing the Border Security Program. Funded largely through the Department of State's limited fee retention authorities for consular services, the Bureau of Consular Affairs has developed ambitious initiatives to strengthen the protection of Americans abroad and our nation's borders. The Border Security Program extends far beyond the Bureau of Consular Affairs to numerous partners within the Department of State including the Bureaus of Diplomatic Security, Information Resource Management, Human Resources, Intelligence and Research and Resource Management, as well as the State

Department's geographic bureaus. Working together, these components form a core element of the coordinated interagency effort.

The Border Security Program is supported by five pillars: human resources, infrastructure, information, connectivity and integrity. The Department of State has developed a consistent, multi-year strategy based on these elements to achieve its goals of safeguarding American citizens at home and abroad.

Human Resources: Investing in the training and professional development of consular employees to ensure that they provide the highest quality border security services. Covering the operating costs of many other Department of State personnel beyond the Bureau of Consular Affairs who support our border security efforts.

Infrastructure: Ensuring that all personnel worldwide who are responsible for border security services have secure and functional facilities, technological support and essential equipment to fulfill their responsibilities. Key elements include an effective equipment replacement program and continued development of modernized consular software.

Information: Providing accurate, comprehensive and timely information to all Department personnel at embassies and consulates worldwide that are responsible for adjudicating passport and visa applications, and providing other consular services. Key elements include data sharing with other agencies, ensuring the interoperability of systems when possible, and continuing improvements to namecheck systems.

Connectivity: Connecting all overseas and domestic operations responsible for border security through redundant, high-speed networks that make possible such powerful tools as the namecheck system called the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS) and the Consolidated Consular Database (CCD).

Integrity: Safeguarding the integrity of consular employees, processes and services through continuous enhancements to consular documents, improvements in information storage and retrieval, expanded training of personnel in namechecking and fraud prevention procedures, and the implementation of a comprehensive program to investigate incidents of passport and/or visa fraud.

The priorities for the Bureau of Consular Affairs in FY 2006 reflect our unwavering commitment to achieving our mission:

- Protecting the lives and interests of American citizens abroad by ensuring that they have the consular information, services and assistance they need to reside, conduct business, study and travel abroad.
- Providing Americans with a secure travel document showing their citizenship and identity, and ensuring that passport services are provided in a timely and efficient manner
- Protecting our homeland by strengthening the visa process as a tool to identify potential terrorists and others who should not receive a visa, and preventing those people from traveling to and entering the United States.
- Providing consular personnel worldwide with the tools and training they need to carry out these responsibilities.

The FY 2005 funding level for the Border Security Program is \$864.466 million. To maintain our aggressive efforts on behalf of U.S. national security, the Department of State is requesting \$930.610 million in FY 2006.

### **American Citizen Services**

The Border Security Program promotes the safety and security of approximately 4 million Americans who reside abroad and the Americans who make nearly 60 million trips abroad each year for tourism, study or work. It also includes activities designed to assist American citizens when they need it most: in times of crisis, whether it is a natural disaster or civil unrest.

The Department of State provides current information on travel conditions and security updates through our consular information program, which receives significant public attention. The primary means for distributing this information is the popular website of the Bureau of Consular Affairs, <http://travel.state.gov>. This website registered 171 million page views in 2004, an increase of 30 million page views over the previous year. The Bureau's Office of Citizens Services (OCS) also operates a call center which disseminates information about travel abroad and also serves as a useful communication link to the American public during times of crisis.

The OCS call center was particularly effective in the aftermath of the terrible earthquake and tsunamis that struck numerous countries surrounding the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004. In the six weeks following the tsunamis, the call center took over 32,000 calls from family members and friends concerned about American citizens who might have been in one of the affected areas. From these calls we were able to put 15,112 names into a database and then began to look for these people, coordinating with our posts in the region to locate American citizens or obtain information confirming they were not in the region, to respond to each and every inquiry. We dispatched dozens of consular officers and local staff to the region to help locate and assist American citizens. As of this week there are just 7 unresolved inquiries, and the Bureau will continue to use all of the resources at its disposal until we know everything that is knowable about those last remaining inquiries.

The Bureau also developed and launched an Internet-based system for Americans to register their overseas travel. The Internet-based system makes registration more convenient, while at the same time addressing concerns regarding the security of information protected by the Privacy Act. This centralized, flexible database allows us to assist registrants in case of emergency. Since June 2004, we have logged more than 150,000 registered travelers.

In FY 2004, the Bureau of Consular Affairs:

- conducted 2,616 searches for missing Americans, in addition to the more than 15,000 inquiries from the Indian Ocean tsunami;
- assisted next-of-kin following the deaths of 5,690 Americans outside the United States;
- helped reunite 264 abducted children with parents in the U.S.;
- offered 834 repatriation loans to destitute Americans;
- helped American families adopt 22,884 foreign-born children; and,
- paid 6,910 visits to U.S. citizens imprisoned abroad.

Our information system issued 92 Travel Warnings, 72 other public announcements about conditions abroad and 215 Consular Information Sheets containing detailed information by country. Consular officers issued 39,624 emergency passports to American citizens with immediate travel

needs. The Border Security Program will allow us to continue to offer this essential support to Americans in time of need.

Our priorities for improving our services to American citizens in FY 2006 include: the implementation of the Hague Inter-country Adoption Convention; enhanced services for victims of crime abroad; enhanced emergency response teams, called “fly-away” teams, ; expanding the use of our Internet-based registration system; ; augmenting training for American and international judges in Hague Abduction convention procedures; continuing training of state and local officials on consular notification issues; and issuing a new, emergency US passport book with enhanced security features.

### **Passport Services**

The Bureau of Consular Affairs provides the world’s premier travel, citizenship and identity document to the American public through sixteen domestic Passport Agencies and at Embassies and Consulates all over the world. In FY 2004, CA’s Office of Passport Services issued 8.8 million passports domestically. Passport demand among American citizens has risen to unprecedented levels. Applications in FY 2004 increased by more than 22% over the comparable period in FY 2003. The Department of State previously anticipated receiving 9.6 million passport applications in FY 2005 and at least 10.1 million in FY 2006. However, factoring in the impact of newly enacted legislation, the Department of State now anticipates receiving over ten million passport applications in FY 2005, and as many as 12 million in FY 2006.

In FY 2006 the Bureau of Consular Affairs will begin production of a new, enhanced passport that incorporates a number of innovative security features. These improvements include the digitization and electronic storage of information currently visible on the front pages of the existing passport document including the biographic data and the bearer’s photograph. Passport agencies have also begun using a secure mail process requiring delivery confirmation to reduce the risk of a passport being received by someone other than the intended customer.

While increasing the security of the U.S. passport, the Department of State is also mindful of the importance of providing a high level of customer service to the American public. The Office of Passport Services participated in the

American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for 2003 to measure the satisfaction of participants who were either applying for a passport for the first time or renewing their passport during the past two years. The office of Passport Services achieved a higher score than the aggregate index for Federal Government and private sector/services scores. As the ACSI report noted, “Passport Services delivers quality that surpasses customers’ expectations.”

### Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative

Section 7209 of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 requires the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to develop and implement a plan by January 1, 2008 to require U.S. citizens, as well as non-U.S. citizens, to present a passport or other secure travel document that denotes identity and citizenship when entering the United States. Consistent with this legislation, by January 1, 2008, the initiative eliminates the long-standing regulatory action that has permitted U.S. citizens and Canadian citizens traveling within the Western Hemisphere, and Canadian citizens crossing the land border between the United States and Canada to enter the U.S. without presenting a passport or other secure document.

We understand the implications that this initiative might have for industry, business, and the general public and our neighboring countries, and we will work with affected stakeholders throughout the process. For this reason, we are proposing a phased implementation plan, providing as much advance notice as possible to travelers to enable them to acquire necessary travel and identification documents (passport or other secure document to be determined at a later date) for each phase of the initiative. We are proposing to:

1. Apply the requirement to all travel to or from the Caribbean, Central America and South America by **December 31, 2005**.
2. Apply the requirement to all air and sea travel to or from Mexico and Canada by **December 31, 2006**.
3. Apply the requirement to land border crossings by **December 31, 2007**.

An Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) regarding the requirement is currently under review and will be published in the Federal

Register shortly, to allow for ample time for what we expect will be considerable public comment. The Department of State, working closely with the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies, will conduct aggressive outreach to ensure that legitimate travel is not impeded. We know we do not have all of the answers and will encourage comments from the public, state and local government officials and concerned businesses.

Full implementation of the program by the deadlines we are proposing will be challenging, and it will require significant resources. During FY 2006, in fact, the Bureau of Consular Affairs anticipates it may reach its maximum passport production capacity. The Bureau is exploring solutions to address this potential problem.

### **Visa Services**

The Border Security Program encompasses every aspect of the visa process, from the “raw materials,” including Border Crossing Cards for Mexican citizens, visa foils, to funding the salaries of consular staff, as well as some Diplomatic Security and Information Resource Management employees.

Consular officers serving at over 200 embassies and consulates around the world that adjudicate visa applications serve on the front lines of the global war on terror. Since the horrific attacks of September 11, 2001, we have undertaken a top-to-bottom review of visa procedures to ensure that we have in place as strong a shield as possible against those who would do us harm. One of the most important tools we can provide to consular officers in this effort is real-time information gathered by intelligence and law enforcement agencies that can help them identify terrorists, criminals and other ineligible aliens and make sure that they are denied visas. Although we have nearly tripled the information holdings in the CLASS namecheck database since June 2002, we continue to explore additional areas where consular officers could benefit from increased interagency information sharing.

In advance of the Congressional deadline of October 26, 2004, the Bureau of Consular Affairs implemented a Biometric Visa Program at each visa adjudicating post worldwide. At each post we now collect electronically scanned fingerprints of nearly all non-immigrant visa applicants, and a machine-readable immigrant visa that contains a digitized photograph and scanned fingerprints of the alien. The fingerprints are matched against the Department of Homeland Security’s database when visaed travelers apply

for entry to the U.S. By enrolling visa applicants' biographic data in this way, the Biometric Visa Program contributes to DHS's entry-exit control program known as US-VISIT.

October 26, 2005 is the date by which travelers from Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries must present passports incorporating a biometric identifier complying with the standards established by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for continued entry into the U.S. without a visa.

Individuals possessing passports issued prior to this deadline are grandfathered. All VWP countries have programs in place and are making varying degrees of progress toward implementing what we expect will in July 2005 become an official ICAO recommended practice for biometric utilization. They are also moving toward or have already met ICAO specifications for improved photo quality in furtherance of biometric utilization. We are continuing to look at the requirements of the Congressional legislation and the practical issues associated with implementing the various ICAO specifications and recommendations.

The Department's two domestic visa support operations deserve special mention. The National Visa Center (NVC) provides worldwide support to immigrant visa processing posts and is actively engaged in anti-fraud efforts in coordination with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security. The Kentucky Consular Center (KCC) uses facial recognition technology to review nonimmigrant and diversity immigrant visa applications for fraud and will also centralize the pre-adjudication processing of all petition-based nonimmigrant visas. The KCC will continue its management of the successfully established electronic registration process for diversity immigrant visas.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs will continue to upgrade and refine the technology used in the collection of fingerprints and the use of facial recognition technology during the visa adjudication process. This will include improvements in the integration and compatibility between Consular visa systems and the databases of the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other law enforcement and intelligence agencies including the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC).

We have re-engineered the interagency visa clearance process to enhance accountability and improve efficiency, investing significant funds and time



in our systems to move visa applicants more quickly through the interagency clearance process while maintaining its integrity. A Government Accountability Office study published in February 2005 noted marked improvement in the processing time for interagency clearances related to sensitive technology transfer.

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 also included provisions that incorporate recommendations from the 9/11 Commission Report and are designed to enhance the federal government's ability to detect and disrupt terrorist travel. The Department of State is working closely with the Department of Homeland Security to enhance the training of consular officers in the detection of fraudulent documents and terrorist travel patterns, to develop a plan to deploy document authentication technology and to increase information exchange on foreign travel within the government, as well as sharing information on terrorists with trusted allies. The Bureau of Consular Affairs is working to enhance the sharing of lost and stolen passport information with Interpol and other governments and to ensure that posts that experience the highest level of fraudulent documentation associated with consular services have full-time fraud specialists on board. We are also assisting the Bureau of Diplomatic Security in fulfilling a requirement of the legislation that it create a program for visa and passport security targeting the production, use and dissemination of fraudulent travel documents.

### **Management and Organizational Excellence**

A consistent priority of the Department of State is to strengthen homeland security by ensuring that the consular function has appropriate facilities and staffing to fulfill the mission of the Border Security Program. Between FY 2002 and FY 2006 consular staffing will have increased by 570 new positions. For example, in FY 2005 we will hire 55 staff to handle increases in passport and visa workload and 63 new Foreign Service officer positions will be created to complete the last tranche in our multi-year Consular Associate Replacement Program. This program shifts responsibility for visa adjudication held by consular associates, who are eligible family members, to full time consular officers.

Underpinning the management of consular operations worldwide are efficient and state-of-the art systems. Leveraging technology not only

improves the efficiency of our operations, it has become a necessity for interagency data sharing and supporting rapid change in consular operations. We will continue to replace information technology equipment for consular sections abroad as well as domestic operations on a three to four year cycle. We will continue to provide updated remote and computer-based training on consular systems to supplement hands-on training by experts deployed overseas, and maintain support desks to provide responsive links between employees and experts in the Consular Systems division. The Border Security Program will also continue to fund mainframe support for the CLASS namecheck system by the Department's Bureau of Information Resource Management.

Internal controls are a critical component of good management. To date, we have issued 81 formal standard operating procedures (SOPs) to ensure uniformity in procedure and to reinforce the importance of proper safeguards in visa and passport adjudication, as well as substantial additional guidance to consular managers and Chiefs of Mission. We reiterate the importance of following these procedures during our visits to Embassies and Consulates, in regular guidance to the field, at training programs and during leadership conferences for Ambassadors and Deputy Chiefs of Mission. By the end of May the Bureau of Consular Affairs will have completed 77 assessments of overseas posts (since February 2003), utilizing Consular Management Assistance Teams, to assess the integrity of management controls, effective resource utilization and space allocation, and the extent to which the Bureau's Standard Operating Procedures have been implemented. And we will continue a robust schedule of visits. The Bureau's Vulnerability Assessment Unit, a joint initiative with the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, is a proactive approach to preventing fraud and malfeasance. The Unit continues to analyze consular data and systems to detect anomalies in visa and passport processing, thus encouraging sound management and transparent processes.

I thank you for the opportunity to discuss the important ways that the State Department's Border Security Program enhances U.S. national security. I welcome your questions.